TRANSPORTATION

Figure 88: A brick street in OTR.

Over-the-Rhine's transportation network can be very challenging. The neighborhood's location between downtown and the university/medical complex means that it must accommodate significant non-local traffic that is going from downtown to the University of Cincinnati and parts north. It is also a neighborhood with a strong pedestrian scale and an intention to stay that way. The challenge is to serve through-traffic and local circulation needs which are much more pedestrian and transit oriented in nature.

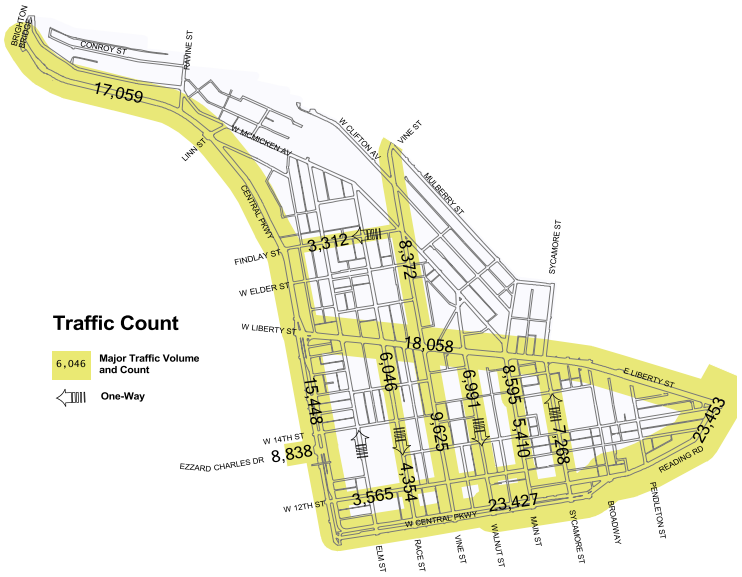


Figure 89: Traffic Volume. Thicker Shading = more traffic volume

Figure 90: Pedestrian Incidents

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

There are several challenges associated with ensuring safe and efficient transportation in OTR while maintaining neighborhood scale. The transportation committee dealt with key issues relative to traffic congestion and safety for vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians throughout the community. Increased public transit and parking options were also a priority. A few of these issues are described below.

The Street System

OTR has a street grid whose north/south system is a continuation of the downtown grid. This street network serves the needs of local vehicular and public transit travel as well as the needs of through traffic. Vine Street, Central Parkway and Liberty Street provide access from the Central Business District through several Cincinnati neighborhoods and into other municipalities.

Transportation must also accommodate traffic to some important destinations in the neighborhood. Music Hall, Findlay Market, Main Street, Rothenberg and Washington Park Elementary Schools and the School for the Creative and Performing Arts are all destinations that place different kinds of demands on the street network.

An integral part of the vehicular transportation system is parking. As the neighborhood is redeveloped, the demand for parking for housing, businesses and destinations will increase. The complexity of maintaining the pedestrian scale of the neighborhood and responding to the contemporary standard of development is going to mean that parking is always an issue. While this plan makes a series of recommendations about how we can handle the car as unobtrusively as possible, it also realizes that there will not be a space for everyone's car.

Pedestrian Circulation
Pedestrian circulation is critical to the needs of the residents, businesses and schools in OTR. Pedestrian circulation should link community open space, housing, schools, shopping, cultural destinations and all of the other amenities in the neighborhood for residents, visitors and the daily work force. Sidewalks, alleys and interior block walkways are all an important part of this system.

Public Transit
Public transit is a critical system for OTR. It provides transportation for many residents who do not own cars to get around in the neighborhood and downtown. Just as importantly, it provides a vital link between OTR residents and jobs elsewhere in the region. Public transit can be an important transportation choice for people with cars as well. The density and urban character of the neighborhood may make transit the preferred choice of many residents.

Metro bus service currently provides public transit in OTR. 14 bus routes serve the area. Five of these routes converge at the intersection of Vine, West McMicken and Findlay Streets, known as the Five Points Area on Vine Street.

There are many regional policy discussions occurring around transit improvements including greatly expanded and enhanced bus service, a light rail system and a trolley or streetcar system. OTR stands to benefit greatly from these types of systems. The kinds of mobility and economic development improvements that other communities across the country have experienced because of transit-oriented development have been very impressive. OTR has all the characteristics that could make transit oriented development and new transit systems successful in the neighborhood. How any of these improvements will physically impact the neighborhood will have to be studied carefully to avoid any negative impacts.

The discussion below identifies some of the issues that have been identified around the currently proposed alternatives:

MetroMoves Plan 2001
The MetroMoves Transit Plan has an objective to reduce traffic congestion while connecting people to jobs, neighborhoods to neighborhoods and suburbs to suburbs. Southwestern Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA)'s most dramatic plan for change in 30 years, creates new bus routes, all linked by a network of new, conveniently located transit hubs. It also allows for connections with light rail resulting in an improved public transportation system for residents of Greater Cincinnati. This regional effort will enhance transit operation in OTR and area wide.

The MetroMoves plan identifies several bus enhancements for OTR that are supported by this set of recommendations. They include; a transit hub in teh vicinity of Liberty and Vine Streets, a new cross-town bus route along Liberty Street, an entertainment-related shuttle to service Main Street and other attractions such as Findlay Market and Music Hall, and upgraded transit-related amenities such as bus shelters.

I-71 Corridor Study and the Regional Rail Study
The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) is engaged in a study of the construction and operation of a light rail system in the region. The original proposed alignment for the I-71 route would go through OTR as a connection from downtown to the University of Cincinnati area. Current discussions in the Regional Rail Study have proposed a light rail alignment that would use more of the I-71 corridor and avoid the construction of a significant, expensive tunnel. In this scenario, OTR would be served by trolley service connected to the light rail line.

Central Area Loop Study

The loop circulator, a part of OKI's Transportation System Management (TSM) program, is designed to decrease traffic congestion and improve mobility to downtown Cincinnati, Covington and Newport while remaining cognizant of possible effects on the environment and on the historic neighborhoods. Techniques such as dedicated transit lanes and transit signal prioritization, traffic signal modification, lane stripping, added left-turn lanes and additional signage will be used. Buses will be the dominant transportation mode for the circulator. Additionally, the study recommends that modern trolley or streetcar service for downtown Cincinnati, Covington and Newport be examined further and incorporated into an overall Regional Rail Strategy. Furthermore, the OTR Transportation Committee supports coordinating with the Central Area Loop team.

Business/ Residential Parking Demand

There are many scattered parking lots throughout the district that are used by business patrons and residents. There is a need for additional off-street parking spaces, although a sea of paved parking lots is not desired. The demands primarily stem from business employees and patrons in OTR and the Downtown areas, particularly in the southern part of the neighborhood and along Main Street where there are significant business and entertainment activities. The erection of two new parking structures for commercial use, one in the vicinity Music Hall and the second in the vicinity of Main Street, should relieve specific problems and also free up more on-street parking for residents.

Beyond the structures mentioned above, additional parking needs could be handled with smaller "pocket parking lots." Vacant lots throughout the community can be used for parking to accommodate adjacent residential and business uses. The intention of this proposal is to provide off-street parking on existing vacant lots, some of them dedicated spaces for residential uses and some open parking for shared use by businesses in an area. Securing properties for parking structures or parking surfaces in a mature inner-city neighborhood can be challenging. The goal is to integrate all parking into the fabric of the neighborhood by integrating it into mid-block lor alley lots and not fronting it on major streets. Future development such as that on Main Street and along Liberty Street will result in increased parking demand south of Liberty Street. Other areas which will demand more parking facilities are Vine Street between 13th and Liberty Streets, the Music Hall area, the OTR Recreation Center and Main Street north of 12th Street.

Figure 91: Exisitng Off-Street Parking

Figure 92: Vine Street, looking north toward Liberty Street. Photo courtesy of Ken Cunningham and Associates.

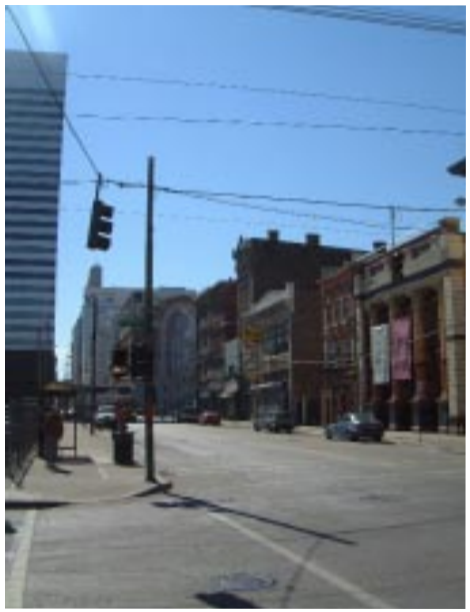


Figure 93: Vine Street, looking south towards Central Parkway. Photo courtesy of Ken Cunningham and Associates.

Vine Street

As part of the ULI study recommendations and with support from the business community, Vine Street was converted from a one-way to a two-way street in 1999. The action was to be evaluated over time to determine its success in improving the climate for business along Vine Street and also to determine its impact on traffic flow. A final outcome on this project has not been reached. There has been much debate over this issue both in the planning process and in other forums. Vine Street is a tremendously important corridor in the neighborhood for many reasons: it carries a great deal of regional through-traffic between downtown and the university area; is the major neighborhood-serving retail corridor in the neighborhood; and it sets the image for the neighborhood and in many respects for the whole inner-Cincinnati area.

Ultimately, fully implementing the two-way system or converting Vine Street back to a one-way system will take additional study and more physical improvements.

The OTR Transportation Committee recommends further study of Vine Street and connecting roadways to weigh the following:

- Street direction and its impact on the overall circulation pattern for adjacent streets, OTR and the CBD
- Vehicular and pedestrian safety
- Traffic flow vs. "beneficial" congestion
- Parking and loading – on-street vs. off-street
- Emergency vehicle response times
- Current and future public transportation options
- Economic impact
- Urban design components

Liberty Street

Liberty Street is very important to OTR as a roadway facilitating traffic that includes automobiles, pedestrians and bicyclists' movement to and from the neighborhood and as a gateway. It is the only major east-west connection in the neighborhood and one of the few in the whole basin area. The city's Department of Transportation and Engineering in conjunction with Ken Cunningham and Associates and the community has created a streetscape proposal intended to improve the balance between pedestrian and vehicular traffic and greatly enhance the image of the corridor.

Figure 94: The Liberty Street/Reading Road intersection with improvements that create a regional auto gateway and larger-scaled pedestrian accessible public space. By Consultant - Design Team.

Figure 95: The intersection of Liberty Street and Reading Road.

Figure 96: The intersection of Liberty Street and Reading Road.

Central Parkway

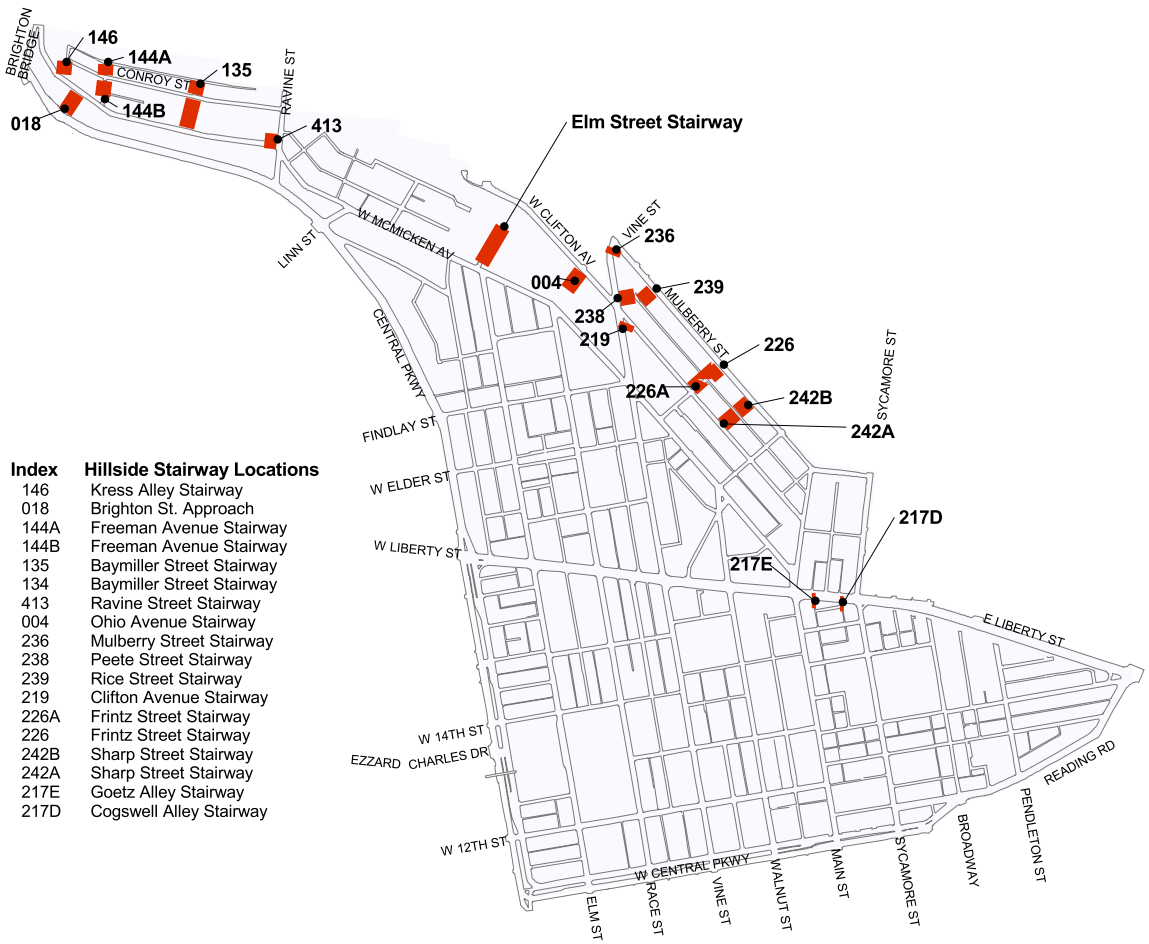
Central Parkway restoration is supported by the community who remembers the roadway as previously designed as part of the Cincinnati Park System by prominent landscape architect George Kessler in 1907. Central Parkway, with more greenery, wider center islands and fewer vehicular lanes, served as a vital feature for nearby residents and pedestrians. Improvements, particularly the greening of the north and south spaces, could be made. However, given the high volume of traffic on this major east-west arterial, the elimination of lanes and widening the center island is not feasible.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodation

Walking and cycling are sensible and enjoyable modes of transport in a densely populated area such as OTR. There are also many residents of OTR who do not have access to an automobile and hence travel by foot or bicycle to area attractions including places of employment, entertainment and shopping centers. The plan stresses the importance of projects such as new curb ramps and street calming measures such as the reduction of motor vehicle speed and refugee islands to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety. Already, many people make use of these modes of transportation; the numbers are sure to increase as safety features are upgraded and signage leading to facilities in and around the community is improved.

Specifically, any circulation projects or improvements to major roadways such as Vine, Race, Main and Liberty Streets or Central Parkway should include appropriate signage for pedestrians and cyclists. In addition to facilitating movement between locations, such improvements should decrease jaywalking, risky cut-throughs and increase general safety.

Figure 97: A sketch of improvements to make the Liberty Street/Central Parkway intersection more pedestrian-friendly. By Consultant - Design Team.



Index	Hillside Stairway Locations
146	Kress Alley Stairway
018	Brighton St. Approach
144A	Freeman Avenue Stairway
144B	Freeman Avenue Stairway
135	Baymiller Street Stairway
134	Baymiller Street Stairway
413	Ravine Street Stairway
004	Ohio Avenue Stairway
236	Mulberry Street Stairway
238	Peete Street Stairway
239	Rice Street Stairway
219	Clifton Avenue Stairway
226A	Frintz Street Stairway
226	Frintz Street Stairway
242B	Sharp Street Stairway
242A	Sharp Street Stairway
217E	Goetz Alley Stairway
217D	Cogswell Alley Stairway

Figure 98: Stairways in OTR.

Preservation of Hillside Steps

Stairs are valuable resources in the community, and are considered rights-of-way and threfore fall under the city's jurisdiction. The city maintains 362 stairways citywide, 18 of them in OTR, under its Hillside Stairway Program in the Department of Transportation and Engineering. In the Hillside Stairway Program, the city staff engages the community before adding or abandoning a stairway. The program also includes a process that enables the communities to prioritize steps for upkeep and closure. Closing and removing steps can be accomplished with City Council's approval.

Hillside steps in the neighborhood should be preserved and maintained. The Elm Street Stairway between McMicken and Clifton Avenues is on the list to be preserved together with several others in OTR.

TRANSPORTATION GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Figure 99: A Metro bus with St. Phillipus Church in the background.

Goal: Ensure circulation of pedestrians to, from and within OTR while maintaining a neighborhood scale.

Objectives:

- Facilitate both local and through travel
- Improve public transit opportunities for residents
- Encourage more pedestrian friendly roadway and pathway networks
- Increase off-street and on-street parking opportunities without impacting the urban fabric or historic character of the neighborhood

Figure 100: Liberty Street between Sycamore and Vine Streets in 1955 before street widening.

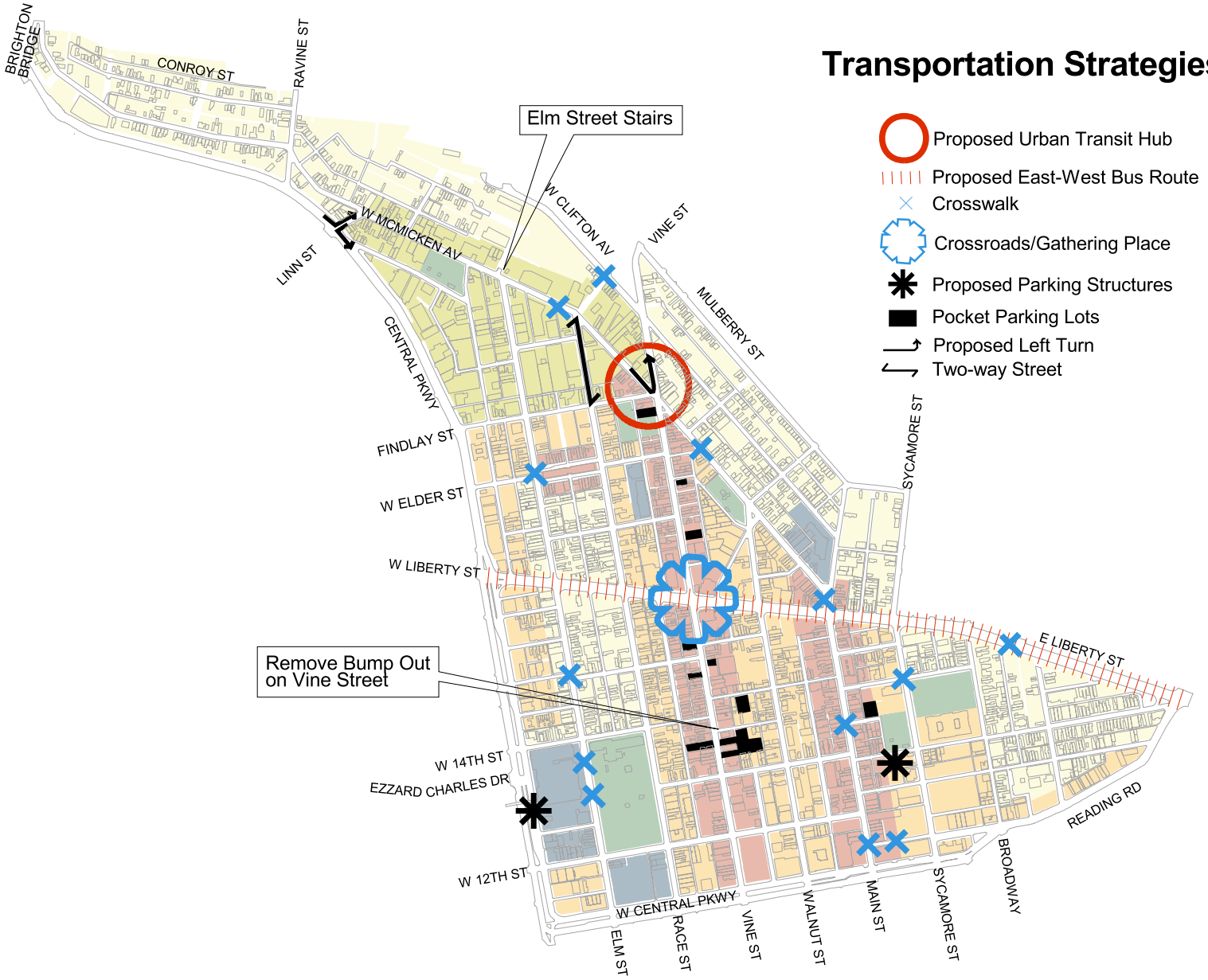


Figure 101: Transportation Strategy Map

Figure 102: Accommodate MetroMoves' proposed new bus hub and possible lightrail line in a redesigned space at the intersection of Liberty and Vine Streets. This public space is designed to accommodate bus shelters that would be dispersed along Liberty rather than concentrated on a single small area such as the CBD's Government Center. This will promote pedestrian movement throughout the intersection and reduce the negative impact of concentrated bus traffic. By Consultant - Design Team.

KEY TRANSPORTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Numerous strategies and projects were identified for OTR. The following is a listing of some of the most significant project recommendations.

Improve Transit Opportunities

Endorse the concept of some type of rail transit through OTR. There is support for some type of new trolley or light rail system to serve OTR. A new system will better serve OTR residents and provide the opportunity for expanded economic development opportunities around transit oriented development locations. As indicated, two key locations for this area will be Liberty and Vine Streets and the Five Points intersection.

Endorse the MetroMoves Plan. OTR supports the increased bus service and transit center or hub concepts as presented in MetroMoves. A shuttle service within OTR and downtown, for day-to-day business, as well as area attractions, is recommended to improve convenience, circulation and vitality for residents, workers and visitors. A Main Street entertainment-related shuttle and other tourist attractions at establishments such as Findlay Market and at neighborhood shelters should be established. The new shuttle should access key destinations for residents, workers and tourists.

Seek coordination with the Central Area Loop Plan. A local circulator or shuttle for the residents and visitors to promote travel between destinations in Over-the-Rhine, downtown, Covington and Newport should be established. Regular buses or trolleys should be used and should connect to the light rail system serving the Greater Cincinnati region.

Support a transit hub at Vine and Liberty Streets as well as improved bus stop amenities with an OTR identity. The hub will provide safer, friendlier stops for riders on several buses connecting at this location.

Improve Pedestrian Network to Support a Walkable Community

Support the design and construction of pedestrian safety measures coordinating with gateways and green space initiatives at the following locations:

- Liberty Street – review geometry and operation of Liberty Street from Central Parkway to Reading Road, introducing bump-outs, islands, street lighting and landscaping elements as needed to facilitate greater use by pedestrians and bicyclists.

- Central Parkway – review geometry and operation of Central Parkway from Twelfth Street to Reading Road, introducing bump-outs, island modifications and landscaping elements as needed.

- Improve street lighting in OTR, where possible, or as part of any streetscape improvements.

- Install zebra type crosswalk markings on pavement at non-signalized or non stop sign controlled street locations such as at Vine and Liberty Streets and Liberty Hill and Vine Streets. Signage relating to crosswalks should be improved where needed.

- Install gateways to enhance the pedestrian character at key intersections at Vine Street and Clifton Avenue; Liberty Street and Reading Road; Sycamore Street and Reading Road; and Central Parkway and Liberty Street.

- Support the retention and improvement of existing and construction of new walkways and stairs as well as the retention of alleys when part of the pedestrian network. Pedestrian and bicycle circulation is important to the neighborhood and should be preserved as a part of construction or redevelopment projects by the City or private developers. We will strive to preserve alleys wherever possible. On a case-by-case basis some alleys may be abandoned as part of new development projects, following full evaluation of the impact on the pedestrian network.

Figure 103: Make roadway improvements and changes to improve the functional and visual connectivity to and within the district. An example of this type of intervention is the proposed widening of the East end of Elder Street. This change provides a direct vehicular and visual connection to McMicken Street. This will allow clear visual access from the north-south arterial streets West to Findlay Market. The market has long benefited from a clear connection to Central Parkway at the West end of Elder. This improvement would allow similar benefits to the East end of Elder Street.

Maximize pedestrian movement connectivity and district cohesiveness through a clear and pleasant network of pathways. Emphasize and reinforce existing system of alleys, pathway, and tertiary streets for through block movement patterns that promote connections between intimate urban areas. These inner-block pedestrian oriented pathways can be, when improved through appropriate landscape, streetscape, and urban design interventions, the focal points of sub-block community clusters of housing. They connect these clusters to the major activity anchors such as Findlay Market, Recreation center, Vine Street Playground and Washington Park. Special paving and an urban landscape are recommended. By Consultant - Design Team.

Support the construction of parking garages and pocket parking lots. *Construct two new parking structures:* one on the existing parking lot near Peaslee Neighborhood Center on Sycamore Street and one in the vicinity of the new School of Creative and Performing Arts, near Music Hall and Washington Park. Additional study on these proposed parking structures should be done to ensure the economic feasibility.

Create pocket parking lots along Vine Street. Pocket parking lots should be located on Vine Street. A way-finding system of special neighborhood signage should also be designed for these neighborhood lots and placed to guide motorists to the facilities.

The plan recognizes the key role these parking facilities and lots play and the need to improve the appearance of these lots by providing appropriate landscaping. The plan urges the adoption of specific guidelines for parking lots described for the OTR (North) Historic District recently approved and adopted by the City Planning Commission and City Council.

The guidelines are paraphrased as: Cars in parking lots should be screened from public view. Appropriate screening includes low masonry walls in conjunction with planting areas and landscaping, low masonry walls with wrought iron fencing and planting areas with landscaping and wrought iron fencing. Chain link fence along sidewalks is inappropriate. Lots with a capacity of ten or more cars should contain trees within the lot as well as around the perimeter of the lot. Concrete curbs, not rolled asphalt bumpers, are appropriate edges of parking lots.

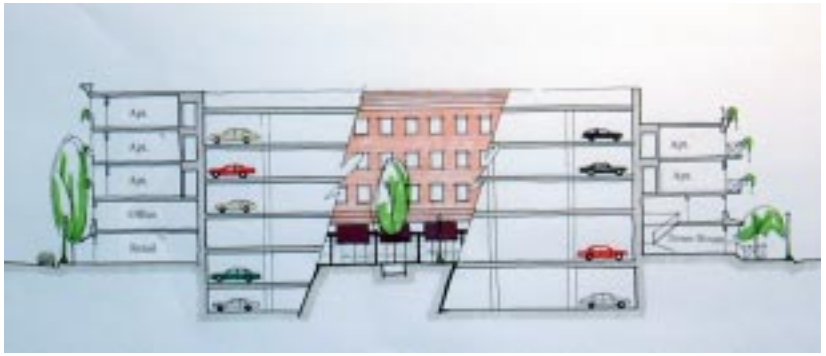


Figure 104: Provide more parking in dispersed small surface lots or in large underground/above ground structured Parking. Providing parking throughout OTR is critical to the vitality of all neighborhood business enterprises, especially Findlay Market, as well as to the viability of existing and new housing opportunities. Small areas of surface parking are acceptable uses in the each sub-neighborhood as long as they are compatible with surrounding buildings and pedestrian spaces. Dispersing all types of parking promotes pedestrian traffic that may support business activity and street vitality throughout. Wherever possible, parking should be located underground below other uses, such as housing. Independent aboveground parking structures may be appropriate in areas that are more commercial. Such parking concentrations should be distributed strategically in locations that serve the highest demand, and the location and design of parking should be related to the neighborhood uses.

In areas of highest concentrated demand, (along Vine, Main, Elder, 12th, Liberty, and Central Parkway) shared parking should be provided through lot consolidations and parcel assembly for structured parking. Ideally, these locations would be located mid-block, shielded from street frontage, perhaps by other uses, and situated in existing urban service areas away from concentrated housing districts. *(See illustration on page 10).*

Structured parking is appropriate fronting Central Parkway, if it is accessed from Central and housed in multi-story buildings that are screened by historically architecturally appropriate cladding and include street-level retail and office space. By Consultant - Design Team.

Figure 105: Parking for residential use should be provided in each sub-neighborhood with particular attention to how it may be configured to support multi-family building clusters and single-family owner occupied housing.

Small "pocket" shared surface parking lots can support some multi-family building clusters. "Pocket" shared surface parking may be substituted for infill development in some, but not all cases, of the secondary and tertiary streets, depending on location, benefit, and the existing density of the surrounding built environment.

On-site parking for new or rehabbed single family structures (proposed on tertiary streets) is essential and should be provided through side yard setbacks for front driveway entry, front entry (single bay only) garage under living space, and preferably through rear yard entries from alleys. Entry to shared parking lots is also preferred from internal block alleys.

Proposed new east-west alley connections as suggested in the Findlay Market District will facilitate access to inner-block parking. The design of existing alleys should be studied to facilitate improvement for auto access, such as enlarging narrow alley curb restraints by lowering the curbs until the alley surface brick is nearly flush with the curbs and preserving the historical materials while possibly adding new material to widen the alley. By Consultant - Design Team.

Figure 106: Public open space with green elements are appropriate to special places in the community, such as at the "community focal point" and transportation hub proposed at the intersection of Vine and Liberty Streets. By Consultant - Design Team.

Support the study and evaluation of the following traffic improvements, with implementation as recommended.

Minor traffic signal changes and other related Transportation Systems Management (TSM) improvements are necessary to better serve the needs of businesses and residents within the community. The recommended TSM improvements are:

• Left turn from Mohawk Street to Central Parkway

• Two way conversion of Race Street from Findlay Street to McMicken Avenue

• Study of Vine Street – economics vs. safety / one-way vs. two-way/ urban design characteristics of both/integration with, and impact on, the entire OTR transportation network, including the potential for future public transportation improvements

• Twelfth Street and Central Parkway southbound left turn analysis – should be studied and any recommended changes should be included with the new K-12 Arts School development

Figure 107 and 108: Green space development can function to enhance major arterial gateways, such as Liberty/Reading and Liberty/Central. Provide clear wayfinding systems and gateways for the neighborhood that facilitates movement within the area and from regional arterials (1-75/71) to the district. This includes improvements at two scales. At the citywide auto-oriented scale, landscaped gateways are proposed at the east and west ends of Liberty with a coordinated auto-oriented wayfinding and lighting system. At the pedestrian scale a pedestrian oriented lighting system, place-makers, and other identity elements that include adaptations for the sight and hearing impaired are proposed. By Consultant - Design Team.

PRIORITY TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

The City is committed to the implementation of this Plan. The following projects are consistent with the Transportation recommendations, are currently underway and are expected to be completed within the next 2-3 years.

Phase One Committed Projects
Completed by the end of 2004

Vine Street Circulation Study
Study to determine the best traffic circulation patterns for Vine Street including consideration for transit and enhanced bus service
City investment: $33,000

Implement Traffic System Management (TSM) Upgrades
Implementation of a number of specific traffic enhancement including:Mohawk left turn
Investment to be determined